



April 6, 2005

MLPA Public Comments
c/o The California Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814
Attn: Melissa Miller-Henson

RE: Recommendations Regarding Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group

Dear Ms. Miller-Henson:

We are writing to offer some suggestions regarding the composition of the Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (RSG). It is our understanding that this group will be made up of ten to fifteen key stakeholders from the Central Coast region, bringing with them different biological, socioeconomic and other local community information and perspectives to the process of designing alternative MPA proposals for the Central Coast Study Area. Given the central role of the RSG in the MLPA Initiative, the composition of this group is extremely important to the successful outcome of the Initiative. We respectfully ask that you consider the following recommendations in your selection of the RSG.

Balance of Interests Represented

Under the MLPA framework, the regional stakeholder groups appear to be the primary entity responsible for initiating proposals for protected area networks (which will then be developed through an iterative process with scientists and the Task Force). This fact makes it imperative that the composition of the RSG reflect that the oceans are a public asset, held in trust for future generations, and that a large majority of Californians support the creation of more marine protected areas, including marine reserves.

A poll by the Public Policy Institute of California in November 2003 found that three quarters of the state's residents favor creating more marine reserves. An Edge Research poll in 2002 found that 71% of Californians statewide support the creation of fully protected areas. That number rises to 78% in the central part of the state. Previous polls have found similar results. Furthermore, the PPIC poll found that 88% of Californians say the condition of the ocean and beaches is personally important to them. The values held by the vast majority of residents must be amply represented in the RSG. At a minimum, we believe this requires that there be a fair balance between non-consumptive

and consumptive representatives on the group. At least half the members of this group should be people who will take the initiative to identify protected area sites and networks that meet the goals and guidelines of the MLPA.

Size of Group

We support keeping the RSG as small as possible. We recognize that there is significant interest in the MLPA Initiative, that many individuals are likely to be interested in serving on the RSG, and that each potential RSG member could bring useful expertise. We also recognize that there are diverse interests that need to be represented for the RSG to be effective. However, for the RSG to accomplish its tasks in the time allotted to it, the group must be able to communicate well, get to work immediately and work efficiently over the next several months. We believe that above a certain limit, the productivity of the group will be inversely related to its size. We strongly urge you to stay within the ten- to fifteen-member range, and to resist the inevitable pressure to expand that number.

Interests to Include on RSG

The MLPA has a wide range of goals related to healthy ocean ecosystems, including conservation, recreation, education, and study. Under the MLPA Initiative, the RSG will be responsible for evaluating scientific and socioeconomic information and designing alternative MPA proposals. The RSG will also be responsible for drafting a management plan for the regional MPA proposals. The RSG should therefore include individuals with expertise in all of the areas listed above. The general types of interests that should be represented on the RSG include educators, managers, individuals with monitoring and enforcement expertise, consumptive and non-consumptive users, and conservation interests.

RSG Member Qualifications

It is neither feasible nor desirable for each and every potential interest group to have a seat on the RSG. We urge that the RSG composition not attempt to provide each narrow interest with its own representative, as such an effort will inevitably lead to complaints that some particular interest was left out and pleas to add additional seats to the group. Rather than attempting to ensure that each dive club, each fishing gear type, or every section of the coast has its own seat on the RSG, we hope you will make clear in the recruitment process that you are looking for individuals with broad knowledge, constructive working relationships with others, and the ability to represent a broad constituency. We appreciate that you have already encouraged the development of coordination mechanisms within and across interest groups, and the use of representatives in those bodies. It makes good sense to apply the same principles here. Candidates willing and able to represent coalitions of interests should be given preference in the selection process.

It is also important that individuals selected to serve on the RSG understand the nature of the RSG's role in the broader MLPA Initiative, and are committed to working together to achieve results in a fixed timeframe. RSG representatives should clearly understand the requirements on their time, and the responsibility to prepare for and attend meetings as well as do outreach to their constituencies.

Support for Alternates

Given the need to keep the RSG small, include diverse stakeholders, involve representatives with knowledge of a wide geographic area, and the requirement that RSG members be able to commit a significant amount of time to the MLPA process over the next several months, we urge you to consider allowing RSG members to have designated alternates. Alternates would receive meeting materials, be invited to attend all meetings, be able to "caucus" with primary representatives as needed, be responsible for "keeping up" with the activities of the RSG, and sit in for absent primary representatives.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Kaitilin Gaffney and Erin Simmons, The Ocean Conservancy

Karen Garrison, NRDC

Steve Shimek, The Otter Project

Mike Osmond, World Wildlife Fund